

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN AMBON DURING THE 19TH CENTURY: AMBONESE BURGER

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The parameter

Spice production was one of the main characteristics of the social system of the Ambon islands in the 17th century. The system of land use and other aspects of the structure of the villages in those islands more or less supported the spice monopoly of the VOC (Knaap 1987). But, starting in the mid 18th century, the VOC authorities began to notice a decline in their monopoly on the Ambon spice trade due, among other things, to competition from British traders. The British interregnum (1797–1816), with its stress on warfare and neglect of the spice monopoly, was the main factor in the deterioration of spice production. The monopoly was weakened by the London agreement of 1824 between the Dutch and the British, which allowed spices to be planted and traded in North Maluku (Wright 1958). Although the monopoly on the Ambon islands was not abolished until 1864, the developments during the 19th century eventually did bring changes to Ambonese society. The effect of liberal ideas on Dutch colonial policies after the mid 19th century also had an impact on Java, though in quite different ways (Fasseur 1992).

Putting the economic aspects aside, this study attempts to analyze the developments that took place among the population of the Ambon islands during the 19th century. Articles and books written in the 19th and early 20th centuries describing those changes stressed the role of a social group referred to as *Ambonsche Burgers* or *Inlandsche Burgers* (Bakhuizen van den Brink 1915, De Bruin Kops 1895, Ludeking 1868). While those articles use such terms to denote Ambonese living around Kota Ambon as a part of the *burger* (civilian) community of the city, I will here adapt the term to indicate all Ambonese in the 19th century who had, voluntarily or otherwise, lost their status as villagers, thus liberating them from compulsory labor (*kwatrodiensten*, *heerendiensten*).

Thus, in this work, the term Ambonese burger denotes a specific social category of the 19th century, with internal differentiation as analyzed in the following sections. While the term *Ambonsche Burgers* only denotes the indigenous demographic component in various kampongs (such as Mardika, Halong, Rumatiga, or Poka) who can be considered the “original” *Ambonsche* (or *Inlandsche*) *Burgers*, the concept of Ambonese Burger as used here includes workers in the castle towns as well as government employees and professionals. The main criterion is that Ambonese Burgers earned their living from wages or salaries and played a distinct part in the social life of the village community.

The changes that took place with the emergence of the Ambonese Burgers in my opinion laid the structural foundation for further development during the next century, during which Ambonese began to migrate to Java and other islands to become part of a wider colonial context encompassing the whole of the Dutch Indies. The articles mentioned earlier also include under the term *Inlandsche Burgers*, besides those of mixed blood, the descendants of what were called *mardijkers*, manumitted Portuguese slaves remaining in Ambon (at Kampong Mardika) after the Portuguese left the city in the early 17th century. This category of burger, along with the *Europesche Burgers*, naturally do not fall within the bounds of Ambonese burgers as defined in the present work.

Neither the burgers mentioned in those articles nor the Ambonese burgers discussed here should be mistaken for the bourgeoisie, the middle class that emerged in Europe after the late middle ages. Although the emergence of the burgers in Ambon precipitated a process of social differentiation, the burgers did not form a separate independent class. Furthermore, most of the villagers-turned-burgers were later on forced to become villagers again (see below). Only a handful of them managed to become an integral part of the burger category of the city and to develop with the colonial society. Nevertheless, the widespread change from villagers to burgers must have had a civilizing effect on those islands, along with the effects of the agrarian commercial economy and of Christianity.

Since history can be, and has been, regarded as a comparative science, it is interesting to compare these developments in Ambon during the 19th century with similar developments in Java (Fasseur 1992). While in Java “agrarian commercialization” only started in the 19th century (Steinberg 1985), in Ambon more or less similar developments

had started as early as the 17th century (Knaap 1987). Thus, while Java was entering the European market through agrarian commercialization in the 19th century, Ambon began to lose its place there. Nevertheless the early mobilization of the society from the 17th century was an important factor that enabled a number of Ambonese to leave their villages during the 19th century and make the transition to wage labor and salaried work.

General characteristics

Until at least the 17th century, Kota Ambon had always been a city of migrants. The majority of the city dwellers at that time were Southeast Asians (mostly Malays). “In this period the Ambonese were still a rural population” (Knaap 1991: 125). The situation began to change during the British interregnum. A number of villagers began to be attracted to the city and, with a pass from British authorities, were allowed to work in Kota Ambon as manual laborers. Although further research is needed, it is likely that by neglecting forced cultivation and the compulsory labor connected with it, the British found themselves in dire need of manual laborers and tried to meet this demand by allowing villagers to work as wage-earners in the city. Another important British accomplishment was the organization of an auxiliary army, composed mainly of Ambonese, who were given the status of burger and were thus exempt from compulsory labor. Thomas Matulesy, alias Pattimura, and his lieutenants, who started the rebellion of 1817, were an important element of this army.

After the Dutch returned in 1817, villagers continued demanding to become burgers. The authorities even provided passes (*vrijbrief*) for those villagers who were able to prove they could find paid jobs in the city. The Ambon Archives at Arsip Nasional R. I. Jakarta contains many requests from villagers trying to obtain the passes, clearly indicating the great demand for the status of burger among the Ambonese villagers at that time. Of course, not every request was approved by the authorities, because a paying job in the city—and sometimes even family connections—were required to turn a villager into an *aurang beybas* (free person) or burger. Reading these official passes, one gets the impression that the most important factor driving people to become burgers was the need to find new opportunities in the city. The letters of request specifically mention the kinds of jobs to be found in the city: carpenter, boatsman, peddler, *nagelwerkjes*, and so forth, as well as the opportunity to become a government employee (*gouvernements ambtenaar*).

Not only did Kota Ambon attract villagers; smaller “castle towns” in Hila, Saparua, Haruku, Nusalaut, Buru, and Seram also seem to have provided the same kinds of occupations and to have welcomed villagers from the neighboring areas to become burgers. By the mid 19th century, the number of Ambonese burgers was considerable, especially in areas where the Christian population was high (except Nusalaut), as in the Ambon and Saparua districts. The following illuminating estimate was made by Dr. Ludeking (1868), based on the archives of the office of the *Hoofdadministrateur* (central administrator) in Kota Ambon.

AFDEELING	BURGER	NEGERIFOLKS	DUTCH
Ambon	8,060	11,056	731
Hila	366	10,056	17
Haruku	393	6,664	88
Saparua	2,837	8,599	167
Nusalaut	61	3,438	4
Buru	366	9,602	27
Seram	111	30,569	4

SOURCE: Ludeking (1868: 27, 28)

Apart from names and occupations, the archives do not provide us with much data about the Ambonese burgers. Nevertheless, there were internal differences according to the type of work. Besides the villagers in the lowest strata of that category (manual laborers, peddlers), there were also semiskilled workers such as boatsmen and carpenters. At the top of the scale were those employed by the government.

The archives provide more data only on the highest strata who, for some reason, seemed to deserve mention, such as the de Freteses and the Dias of Ambon. It might be useful here to describe them briefly, based on archival evidence. These two families originated from the village of Ema, not far from Kota Ambon, and represent the upper strata of Ambonese burgers. They accepted Dutch culture, spoke a little Dutch, and wore Dutch clothing (pantaloon, shoes, and hats). A small number of them married into one or the other of the many Dutch families who had lived for generations in Kota Ambon, such as the Ariaanszes, the van Aarts, the de Keyzers, the Quenick van Capelles, and the Rijkschroefs. The village *adat* was not functional in these families, especially in the Dias family.

A rather extraordinary example is Raphael Arnoldus de Fretes. After his wife, Jacoba Ariaansz died, he married Pauline Jacoba Ariaansz,

widow of K. A. Rijkschroef, one of the important government employees at the time. He was prosperous in material goods, owning several houses in the city and a sailing boat (of the schooner type) that he used to trade among the islands (Ambon 18, 22, 38, 44, 48, 50, 51, 67, 79, 80, 90, 96, 111, 114, 122, 132, 151, 186, 226, 247, 251, 255, 389, 791, 851, 1044, 1046, 1066, 1076, 1093, 1236, 1293, 1294, 1358, 1369, 1416, 1470, 1479, 1498, 1516).

Civil servants

While the status of Ambonese burgers was not formalized due to the fact that they were always free to return to the villages according to circumstances, those employed by the government were more stable. This is due to the fact that in the mid 19th century the government established the *Ambonsche Burgerschool* (ABS), an elementary education facility especially for the burgers of Ambon (not necessarily only *Ambonsche Burgers*). Those who passed its examinations with excellent marks were also regarded as having passed the lower government employee examination (*kleinambtenaars examen*), giving them the right to become government employees (Leirissa 1984).

However, the de Freteses and the Diasas were among the Ambonese burger families who were able to become officials long before the establishment of the ABS and must have followed a different path of social advancement. This made them pioneers in this domain. In 1841 Raphael Arnoldus de Fretes was a *klerk* (the lowest level of government employee) at the office of the *Hoofdadministrateur* in Ambon. Later he was promoted to a territorial post (*Opziener*) in Buru, where he made his fortune. However, he was dismissed for mismanagement in 1859. While awaiting trial, the government agreed to a proposal by the villagers of Ema to appoint him as village head, replacing E. A. de Fretes. In 1865, after his trial by the *Raad van Justitie*, he had to turn over his post as village chief to M. Leimena. But after that he became a paid middleman much in demand in the *Raad van Justitie*, using his knowledge of the workings of the colonial system to assist people standing for trial.

Other members of the de Fretes family also obtained important posts in the colonial system, especially in education. Mention should be made of J. de Fretes, a trained teacher, who in 1818 had already reached the position of *Opperschoolmeester* (head of the school system for the indigenous) in the district of Ambon and later in Haruku (Ambon 18, 22,

38, 144, 48, 51, 67, 79, 80, 90, 96, 111, 114, 122, 132, 151, 184, 226, 247, 251, 255, 389, 851, 1044, 1045, 1066, 1076, 1093, 1236, 1293, 1294, 1358, 1369, 1416, 1470, 1479, 1498, 1516).

About the Dias, mention should first be made of Abraham Dias, who seems to have become a clerk during the British interregnum. When the Dutch took over from the British, he was appointed *Opziener* in Buru until replaced by R. A. de Fretes. Placed at the office of the central administration, he ultimately succeeded in becoming chief customs officer, a position second only to the chief administrator. Many relatives of his also became government employees, and one of them, Andreas Dias, managed to reach the position of deputy customs officer in Kota Ambon. The importance of the Dias family among the burgers of Kota Ambon is also indicated by the fact that another family member, Carolus Dias, was appointed chief of the city guard (*Kapitein der Burgerij*) (Ambon 107, 114, 129, 145, 184, 369, 1003, 1048, 1162, 1224, 1246, 1266, 1271, 1395, 1441, 1448, 1599).

The position of *Eerste Commies* (section chief) was very seldom held by the Ambonese burgers. After Abraham Dias, Eliza Robert Soselisa was the second Ambonese to hold this post in the mid 19th century. He was the only Ambonese burger at the time who was able to become a member of the Raad van Justitie in Kota Ambon, and from that post he reached the lucrative job of notary public (*Notaris*), also in Kota Ambon (Ambon 163, 390, 399, 1433).

Ambonese burgers were also found in other public offices besides the office of central administrator, such as in the orphan's court and among the executioners. Furthermore, after 1860 the government began to appoint public prosecutors (*jaksa*) for the indigenous courts of law (*Landraad*). As with other bureaucratic jobs, anyone with a certain knowledge of adat could ask to become a jaksa without any professional training beyond elementary school. The jaksas from the 1860s and 1870s were P. D. T. Siahaya for the Landraad Saparua-Nusalaut (later followed by N. E. Manuhutu); P. M. J. Manupassa for the Landraad Haruku (later followed by J. Soselisa); M. A. Tahapary for the Landraad Hitu (later followed by J. G. Perretz); and Theodorus for the Landraad Kayeli (later followed by J. M. Gasperz) (Ambon 14, 64, 99, 129, 1150, 157, 161, 357, 368, 374, 390, 392, 394, 395, 398, 390, 392, 394, 395, 396, 398, 412, 413, 1426, 1480, 1583, 1595, 1597).

Although the courts of law were provided with government-paid prosecutors, during the 19th century no defenders (*advocaat*) were ever appointed. This opened the opportunity for persons with a knowledge of the system, like the aforementioned Raphael Arnoldus de Fretes, to render their services to those who had difficulties during the proceedings of either the Raad van Justitie or the Groote Landraad in Kota Ambon. Besides R. A. de Frestes and E. R. Soselisa, other names frequently occurring in the archives are Tisera, Tehupeiori, Lopies, and Huwae (Ambon 48, 150, 129, 130, 132, 144, 414, etc.).

A number of retired government employees among the Ambonese burgers also tried their luck in plantations. Especially after the discontinuation of the monopoly system in Ambon in 1864, retired government officials of the higher echelons could obtain a contract from the government, plus credit at no interest, to open coffee, tobacco, and cacao plantations in southwest Seram. The Ambonese among them were I. R. Thenu and A. D. C. Pieters (Ambon 355, 368, 378, 380).

The end of the Ambonese burgers

The decline and demise of the Ambonese burger group can be explained by four factors: (1) the informal nature of the Ambonese burger group; (2) the formalization of the status of government officials; (3) a number of government regulations after the late 19th century that limited the activities of the group; and (4) the abolition of the city guard (*schutterij*).

The informal character. Although they all had passes allowing them to stay or work in the castle towns of the Ambon islands, the Ambonese burgers in fact constituted only an informal group. Those performing work in the towns always had the option to return to the village and to the village ways of life when time or luck changed. Their urban occupations were informal, in the sense that no organization, such as a guild, ever developed among them to enhance professionalism, craftsmanship, or bargaining power in the marketplace. Thus it is not surprising that when a system of education developed as a mechanism for recruitment into colonial society, their status became obsolete.

Formalization of the function of government officials. The medical services were the cradle of professionalism in the Ambon islands. These began gradually with the informal function of *vaccinateur* (vaccination officer) in the early 19th century. From then on, serious efforts were made by the colonial government to prevent smallpox from spreading

among the villagers. Prominent villagers (not from the village head clan) were usually appointed, and presumably given the necessary instructions to perform the work of vaccinateur. The Ambon islands (Central Maluku) were then divided into ten vaccinateur districts, each with its own government-paid vaccinateur, sometimes with an assistant (Ambon 14, 64, 99, 122, 150, 152, 161, 357, 368, 374, 1390, 392, 394, 395, 396, 398, 412, 413, 1423, 1480, 1583, 1595, 1597).

The formalization of the role of medical personnel started with the establishment of the Dokterjawa School, a basic medical training facility established in Batavia in 1852. Apart from basic training in the medical sciences, the Dokterjawa also became a separate part of the bureaucracy of the whole Dutch Indies. Originally, students from the Ambon islands were required to return to the islands to be placed in one of the ten vaccination districts. But later, especially during the first half of the 20th century, when the medical training institution was reorganized into the School tot Opleiding voor Indische Artsen (Indonesian Doctor Training School, known as STOVIA), many more Ambonese students became government physicians posted in various parts of Java. Among the Dokterjawas stationed in the Ambon islands were I. Titaley, A. H. Patti-radjawane, N. Latumeten, W. I. Tanasale, A. Lalapua, W. L. Tanalipi, and I. M. S. Ferdinandus (Ambon 99, 131, 355, 369, 371, 374, 380, 381, 1384, 388, 392, 399, 491, 402, 403, 405, 410, 415, 416, 422, 465, 1480, 1499, 1519, 1558, 1566).

Kota Ambon also had its own professional training facility after 1873—the School tot Opleiding voor Inlandsche Leraren (STOVIL)—to train teachers and preachers for the church in the islands. The Ambonese also participated in other professional training institutions opened in Java. The Opleidingschool voor Inlandsche Reschtkundigen (Legal Skills Training School, 1908) provided manpower for the courts and turned the jaksas into professionals and bureaucrats. The Opleidingschool voor Inlandsche Ambtenaaren (Civil Servant School, OSVIA) was another institution. (These and others were followed by colleges of engineering in 1921, law in 1924, and medicine in 1927, in which a number of Ambonese were also trained). These schools became the main vehicle for the recruitment of professionals. The colonial education system was an important factor that made obsolete the function of the burger group as the main reservoir of workers and government officials in the Ambon islands.

Government regulations. From the last decades of the 19th century, villagers were discouraged from obtaining passes and becoming burgers. No further need was felt to provide special permission for people to work in the towns. This was followed by a regulation of 1892 limiting the residence of Ambonese burgers to the original Inlandsche burger kampongs of Mardika, Halong, Rumatiga, and Poka. Nevertheless the number of Ambonese burgers in the first decade of the 20th century was still high: 17,207, divided among Ambon (3,452), Saparua (5,998), Kayeli (107), Hila (36), and the villages (7,614). But during the following decades their number declined sharply, especially in the villages, due to further government regulations limiting their activities. One of these was the prohibition against burgers owning land in the village (ENI VII [1935], 119). In 1927, another regulation was issued requiring burgers living in the towns to pay taxes (from which they had been exempt since the early 19th century), and requiring those living in the villages to perform compulsory labor once again (Stbl. N.I. 1892 nos. 67, 82, 251; 1927, no. 204).

The city guard. One of the colonial institutions that strongly influenced the status of the Ambonese burgers during the 19th century was the city guard established in 1821 in each of the castle towns in the Ambon islands (de Bruin Kops 1895; ENI III [1919], 727–729). The guard, consisting only of burgers, was divided according to race and ethnicity into four companies. Thus, there was one company for European (Dutch) burgers, another for Ambonese burgers, another for (Moslem) *Moorache Burgers*, and another for *Chineesche Burgers*. The guards had their own uniforms, colors, and schedule of exercises. On important occasions they paraded through town showing off their importance to the rest of the people. Most of the prominent Ambonese burgers participated actively in the city guard, and even became part of its officer corps, since membership in it became a very important status symbol. However, during the first decades of the 20th century the organization came to be regarded as obsolete and was abolished, first in Kayeli (1906), then in Hila (1908) and finally in Ambon and Saparua in 1923 (ENI III, [1919], 729).

Conclusion

The emergence of the Ambonese burger group resulted from the changing circumstances in the Ambon islands in the 19th century. The deterioration of clove cultivation may have been the main factor that influenced

villagers to seek employment alternatives in the castle towns of Ambon, Hila, Saparua, and Kayeli. Those who were allowed to work in the towns were provided with a pass that conferred on them the status of (Ambonese) burger and exempted them, like the rest of the burgers, from paying taxes and performing compulsory labor. By the middle of the century, more members of the group regarded as Ambonese burgers resided in the villages than in the towns. This group included a lower stratum of manual laborers and peddlers, a middle stratum of semiskilled carpenters, boatsman, clove workers, and so on, and a higher stratum of government officials.

The demise of the Ambonese burgers can be explained by a number of factors. The most important factor is that, although distinct, they were still only an informal group. Workers in the castle towns were always free to return to their villages and no organizations or guilds developed among them to build professionalism. Even the recruitment of government officials was not based on professional criteria. Rather, the recruits were chosen because of their status as members of the same clan as the heads of their respective villages. Government officialdom began to be professionalized through the education system during the second half of the 19th century, displacing the prerogatives of the Ambonese burgers in the Ambon islands. Subsequent government regulations removed whatever legal basis existed for this group, and the abolition of the city guard removed the proud status of the higher stratum of the Ambonese burgers. By the second decade of the 20th century, Ambonese burgers ceased to exist as a social category. Only the “original *Inlandsche burgers*” living in a number of villages around Ambon bay continued to be regarded as *borgo* (burgers), though without any remaining privileges apart from their heritage.

The formalization of a government bureaucracy as the backbone of the colonial system in the Dutch Indies left a strong impression upon colonial society. Even today, this legacy of bureaucratic culture is still dominant in Indonesian, including the Ambonese, society.

NOTE

This work was a by-product of research for my dissertation presented at Universitas Indonesia in 1990. Earlier versions were presented at Yayasan Tjengke in

Amsterdam in 1991 and at the Second International Maluku Research Conference at the University of Hawai'i in 1992.

The archival materials used in this research are stored at Arsip Nasional R. I., Jakarta. The local archives are divided into *Residentie archiven*. The Ambon archives (Residentie Amboina) are kept in 1621 boxes. The documents cited here are listed by the number of the box containing the documents.

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